

Cattle Business in Mississippi – April 2018
“Beef Production Strategies” article
Dixie Reflections

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How are we already through the first quarter of 2018? This year is literally flying by! One of the highlights of my entire year is having the opportunity to assist with the Dixie Nationals. There are so many things I enjoy about Dixie, but most of all it's the people. It is my Extension co-workers from around the state who work so hard to make the event seem effortless. It is the families in the barns who have worked all year to get their animals to the show. It is celebrating a win or taking a loss. If you haven't been to the Dixie National, you are missing out on one of Mississippi's true treasures. Besides the awesome people and outstanding livestock, I always leave each show with a few new perspectives. These are my three big takeaways from this year's Dixie National.

- 1. Exhibiting livestock exposes our vulnerable side.** During the junior shows, I spend most of my time in the ring – directing “traffic”, keeping the animals moving, or assisting the youth with their cattle. I enjoy watching the interactions between the animals and their humans. From an emotional standpoint, you see it all. There are many smiles, but also a few tears. Then there is frustration, fear, and anxiety. Most of all it is DRIVE, PASSION, and INTENSITY – and I love it. Teaching our youth to showcase themselves and their projects builds confidence. This program, however, teaches us to keep our pride in check. Those wins we don't expect can be so sweet; but those losses we don't see coming can hurt for a while. Learning to win graciously and maintain pride with a loss are two characteristics youth will take with them forever.
- 2. The stock show family is dynamic.** My favorite part of youth livestock shows is watching the stock show family interact. There are always those Mamas who make sure all the kids are fed and clean. Then there Dads who are constantly fighting with the breakers to keep the fans and blowers going. The older siblings coach their little brothers or sisters. The little ones just want to play. Over the years those roles change. The children take on more responsibility and the parents use the shows to socialize. Some say that parents continue living their dreams through their children. I think that is true to certain degree, but with all the other things that compete with our children's time is there anything better?
- 3. You're going to miss this.** I loved showing cattle. Looking for the next “great one” with dad are some of my fondest memories. To those seniors, who walked out of the ring for the last time, it is goodbye, for now – but know you can and should come back. This program needs you more than ever. Go out – make a difference – give back. To those parents, mentor another child, volunteer in your county, come back – we need you too.

As you flip through the pages of this month's *Cattle Business in Mississippi*, you will see many pictures from the 2018 Dixie National. These children and young adults are the future of our

industry. Whether they continue to be active in livestock production will depend on many factors. We can be assured that the training they receive with these projects will set them up for success. If you are not involved with your county's youth livestock program contact your local extension office to find out how you can be a part.

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For more information about beef cattle production, contact an office of the Mississippi State University Extension Service or visit extension.msstate.edu.